

---

# Leadership by design

**Lessons in  
mentorship success  
from Project1932 in  
Saudi Arabia**



# Contacts

## Strategy&

### Abu Dhabi

Chadi N. Moujaes  
Partner  
+971-2-699-2400  
chadi.moujaes  
@strategyand.pwc.com

### Riyadh

Fadi Adra  
Partner  
+966-11-249-7781  
fadi.adra  
@strategyand.pwc.com

Dr. Shihab Elborai  
Partner  
+966-11-249-7781  
shihab.elborai  
@strategyand.pwc.com

## Project1932

### Riyadh

Jana Yamani  
+966- 55-244-4488  
info@project1932

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

### Strategy&

**Fadi Adra** is a partner with Strategy& Middle East, part of the PwC network. Based in Riyadh, he is the leader of the government and public sector practice in the Middle East. He has deep regional expertise in social services, human capital development, and public-sector governance. He has led a number of large-scale projects in reform and transformation, strategic planning, organization design and enactment, and program management and implementation for public-sector entities in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

**Dr. Shihab Elborai** is a partner with Strategy& Middle East. Based in Riyadh, he is a member of the energy, resources, and sustainability practice. He serves major energy industry players across the Middle East and North Africa by redesigning strategy, policies, governance structures, and regulatory frameworks to navigate the shift from fossil fuels to renewables and to help build sustainable energy delivery systems. He co-leads the firm's cross-industry platform on sustainability in the Middle East.

**Chadi N. Moujaes** is a partner with Strategy& Middle East. Based in Abu Dhabi, he is a member of the government and public-sector practice in the Middle East. He focuses on human capital and economic development.

### Project1932

**Jana Yamani** is the managing director of Project1932 and has more than 15 years of executive experience spanning national capacity-building programs, technology, strategy consulting, media, entertainment, and government. Most recently, she was CEO of new business units within the largest media group in the Middle East. Her previous roles included serving as executive manager of fellowship and traineeships at the Mohammed Bin Salman Foundation (MiSK) Foundation; program manager at Microsoft's headquarters; consultant at McKinsey & Company leading advisory engagements across high-growth sectors; and engagement manager at a venture-backed customer experience company in Silicon Valley. She graduated summa cum laude from Northeastern University and furthered her education at MIT, reflecting her commitment to excellence and innovation.

## About Project1932

Project1932 is a Saudi Arabian mentorship initiative focused on developing future leaders by pairing experienced professionals ("BigSibs") with ambitious individuals ("LittleSibs"). The initiative was launched in 2020 and includes four cohorts totaling more than 250 BigSibs and 1,000 LittleSibs. The program fosters personal and professional growth through tailored mentorship and a supportive community. Project1932 emphasizes leadership development and the creation of meaningful connections to empower the next generation. Its vision is to inspire and cultivate talent, having a lasting impact on Saudi Arabia's workforce and society.

Nesreen Wahba, Vlad Gheorghe, and Walid Haddad also contributed to this report.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**As the large-scale transformation initiatives in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)<sup>1</sup> countries come to fruition, they require newly skilled and expanded workforces and many new leaders. We estimate that economic diversification, advanced technologies, and the shift to knowledge-based work will create the need for an additional 700,000 top and middle managers in the region by 2030, which is 30 percent more than were required in 2024.**

GCC governments have prioritized human capital development, principally through education reforms and workforce localization. These efforts have increased workforce participation of GCC nationals and women significantly. However, they are insufficient to equip young professionals with all the practical capabilities and soft skills necessary to meet the coming workforce requirements.

Mentorship programs, which draw upon the Arab world's historical legacy of apprenticeship, can bridge that gap. When systematically structured and executed, mentoring fosters the functional and industry knowledge of emerging leaders, hones their acumen and soft skills, and prepares them for the technological advances shaping the future of work.

Findings drawn from Project1932, a Saudi-based initiative cultivating emerging leaders by connecting them with experienced mentors, indicate that the design of successful mentorship programs entails five elements and three enablers. The elements are shared purpose, synergistic matchmaking, a structured and relevant curriculum, mentoring for mentors, and community power. Successful programs are enabled by strong leadership, robust monitoring and evaluation systems, and coherent financial sustainability strategy.

Further, surveys and interviews of Project1932 participants have revealed five insights for fostering mentoring success. Successful programs challenge mentees to leave their comfort zones, train mentors in active listening so they can provide tailored guidance, build strong mentor–mentee relationships, encourage calculated risk taking, and empower mentees to question the status quo.

Project1932 demonstrates that systematic mentorship programs conducted at scale can bridge the GCC's gap between leadership demand and supply.

## THE URGENT NEED FOR MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS

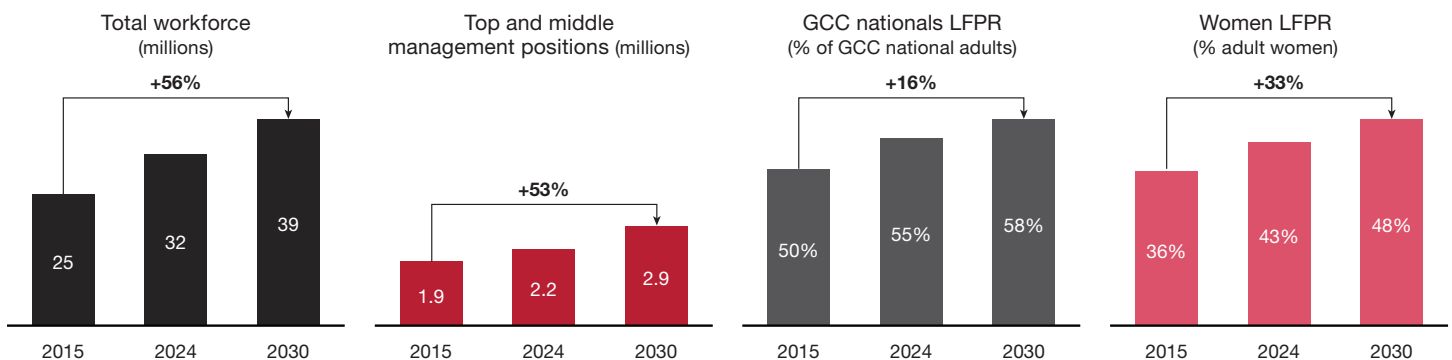
The GCC countries are pursuing large-scale transformation programs aimed at achieving ambitious national mandates, including Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, Qatar's National Vision 2030, and the United Arab Emirates' We the UAE 2031. These transformations are being driven by diversification into new economic sectors, the adoption of advanced technologies, and a shift to knowledge-based work—all of which require a larger and more highly skilled labor force, and a new generation of leaders.

As a result, by 2030, the GCC workforce is forecast to reach 39 million employees—22 percent more than in 2024. Moreover, the demand for top and middle managers will grow apace: By 2030, the region will need 700,000 new leaders—which is 30 percent more than it required in 2024.<sup>2</sup>

Given these projections, it is no surprise that GCC governments have prioritized human capital development, most notably through education reforms and the introduction of workforce localization policies. Approximately 43 percent of adults in the GCC now have an advanced degree—a 50 percent increase in the past decade.<sup>3</sup> Further, these efforts have succeeded in bolstering the labor force participation of nationals from 50 percent to 55 percent in the past decade.<sup>4</sup> Female participation in the labor force has increased from 36 percent to 43 percent in the same period, and it is forecast to reach approximately 48 percent by 2030 (see *Exhibit 1*).<sup>5</sup>

### EXHIBIT 1

#### The development of the GCC workforce (2015–30)



Note: LFPR=Labor force participation rate (average weighted with GCC country-specific labor forces).

Source: National Centre for Statistics & Information (Oman), National Planning Council (Qatar), General Authority for Statistics (Saudi Arabia), Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Center (United Arab Emirates), World Bank, International Labour Organization, GCC national development plans



Education reforms and workforce policies play an essential role in bolstering the size and capabilities of national workforces; however, they are not sufficient to equip young professionals with all the knowledge, experience, and capabilities they will need to lead. Formal education and government policies cannot provide the practical, real-world guidance that leaders need, and such policies lack the agility necessary to address rapidly changing workforce requirements. To become effective leaders, young professionals must have real-world business acumen; interpersonal and emotional skills (often called soft skills); and experience handling tough, time-sensitive, and critical situations. The bad news is that opportunities to develop these qualities can be hard to come by for young people.

The good news is that mentorship, which pairs seasoned leaders with younger mentees in structured programs, provides a proven mechanism for the transfer of real-world leadership knowledge and experience. These programs enable faster career progression, complement formal education, and support the development of leaders who are adaptable and capable of navigating change.

Mentorship programs play an indispensable role in addressing the gap between leadership supply and demand in the GCC countries. They do so by:

- **Bridging the experience gap:** Mentorship programs can provide the practical, real-world guidance missing in education and policies.
- **Modeling soft skills:** Mentorship programs can demonstrate the interpersonal and emotional skills critical for leadership.
- **Responding with agility:** Mentorship programs (unlike rigid systems) can quickly adapt to changing leadership needs.

Moreover, mentorship programs are particularly suited to the GCC countries, where mentoring is deeply rooted in Arab and Muslim history and culture. Mentoring played a central role in nurturing the knowledge and skills of multiple generations of leaders—and accelerating social and economic development—during the Islamic Golden Age (from the eighth to 13th centuries of the Common Era). For example, Al-Khawarizmi, the so-called father of algebra, had his Bayt Al Hikma (House of Wisdom) in Baghdad, a resource for the scholars who congregated there. Ibn Tufayl, a polymath, mentored Ibn Rushd, a philosopher.

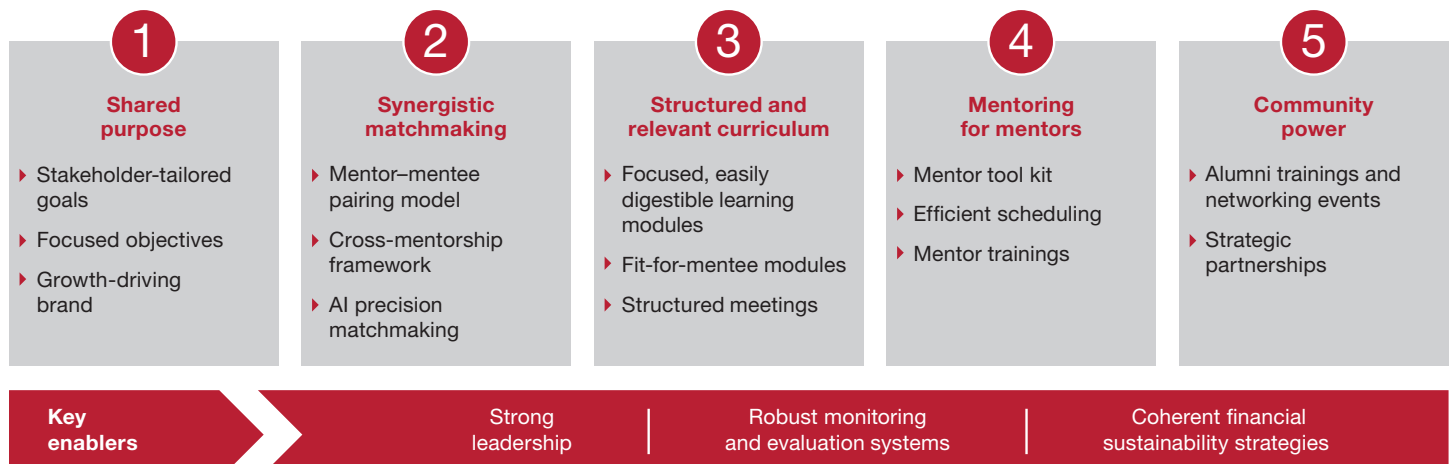
Project1932 in Saudi Arabia seeks to demonstrate that mentoring can do the same today. The project is a mentorship program established in 2020. Its purpose is to develop the next generation of Saudi leaders by connecting established leaders with young professionals and developing their skills and acumen. To date, Project1932 has hosted four cohorts, involving a total of 250 mentors and 1,000 mentees. The mentorship program design recommendations and mentoring insights detailed below are derived from the analysis of Project1932 and participant surveys and interviews. They are supported by research into leading mentoring practices and programs internationally.<sup>6</sup>

## THE DESIGN OF SUCCESSFUL MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS

A successful mentorship program is composed of five elements and three enablers (see *Exhibit 2*).

### EXHIBIT 2

#### Key elements and enablers of successful mentorship programs



Source: Project1932, Strategy&

## **Shared purpose**

Successful mentorship programs create commitment and momentum by articulating the varying goals of their stakeholders—mentors, mentees, and participating institutions—and ensuring that those goals are aligned and have a shared purpose.

Mentors pursue goals such as guiding the next generation of leaders, contributing to their communities, and honing their own leadership skills. Mentees' goals include career advancement and personal development. Institutions may want to identify the next generation of leaders or enhance their own role and reputation as a good corporate citizen. Defining focused and clear objectives for attaining the goals of each stakeholder group is essential to achieving effective, high-impact mentoring outcomes.

All these goals should come together in the achievement of a shared purpose. In Project1932, the shared purpose is accelerating the development of leaders who can effectively contribute to the realization of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. The World Economic Forum's Global Shapers Community is built with the purpose of empowering youth around the globe. The U.S.-based Conexión program aims to cultivate the next generation of Hispanic-Latino leaders.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, the creation of a compelling program brand is essential to the communication of its purpose and value proposition. A strong brand reinforces a program's long-term value and amplifies its impact. It also helps attract high-potential mentees, mentors, and sponsors.

## **Synergistic matchmaking**

Effective mentor-mentee pairings are a cornerstone of successful mentorship programs. Nearly 75 percent of the mentee survey respondents emphasized the importance of compatible matching, crediting their mentors' industry and functional expertise for shaping their career perspectives. Mentors appreciate the synergy generated when they and their mentees have shared interests—such as inquisitiveness, a desire to understand how the world works, business and industry interests, and even hobbies.



---

A strong brand reinforces a program's long-term value and amplifies its impact. It also helps attract high-potential mentees, mentors, and sponsors.

---



Programs can use innovative strategies, such as AI-powered solutions, to enhance how they match mentors with mentees. For example, the Asia Institute of Mentoring (AIM) employs AI-based algorithms for pairing, using a machine-assisted system to shortlist mentors who are compatible with mentees, considering factors such as aspirations, career interests, background, and skills.<sup>8</sup>

Organizations can also capture synergies by creating opportunities for mentees to interact with mentors other than their own. Cross-mentorship initiatives further broaden mentees' horizons by exposing them to diverse leadership styles and experiences. In practice, this can be achieved by temporarily switching mentors during the mentorship journey, with the initial mentor indicating to the mentee the learning and skills that should be developed with the new mentor.

### **Structured and relevant curriculum**

A clearly structured and relevant curriculum, coupled with effective delivery mechanisms and supporting tools, is essential to program success. The mentees surveyed highlighted the importance of tailored mentoring modules; more than 50 percent of the respondents pointed to the value of meeting plans and structured resources. They also stressed the importance of setting clear goals and creating proactive engagement strategies to maximize session outcomes. Toward these ends, Project1932 provides a guided mentorship journey, featuring a monthly topical plan, which is designed to keep mentors and mentees aligned.

Programs can use diverse formats, such as workshops, micro-projects, and gamified tools, to meet the changing learning needs of mentees. Conexión, for example, helps mentees develop practical leadership skills through focused, easily digestible learning modules, delivered through workshops, seminars, and hands-on experiences.

### **Mentoring for mentors**

Mentors also require support. Surveyed mentors expressed appreciation for tool kits containing lists of typical development needs, best practices, and coaching guides. One respondent suggested having a centralized resource hub to streamline access to such tools and mentoring processes.

Empowering mentors with the right tools, resources, and training ensures their long-term success, improves mentee experiences and outcomes, and enhances the overall impact of mentorship programs. AIM, for example, offers comprehensive training sessions to mentors that ensure they can be effective.

Scheduling and communication tools are also critical for fostering mentor engagement and supporting mentors' efforts. More than 60 percent of mentees surveyed called out mentor availability as a key program factor, and 75 percent of mentors emphasized time constraints as a challenge. Project1932 eases the logistical burden on members. It also provides clearly structured agenda topics for discussion at each monthly mentorship meeting, thereby ensuring effective interactions that mentors are prepared for.

## **Community power**

The benefits of mentoring can be compounded over time by the lasting relationships mentoring creates. Strong communities of program alumni—including mentees, mentors, and sponsors—promote networking, continued learning, and career opportunities. More than 65 percent of the surveyed mentees prioritized such networking, many citing the value of interacting with peers who have similar ambitions. Project1932 includes a networking event during the closing ceremonies for each mentoring cohort in order to facilitate the establishment of ongoing relationships.

Alumni networks and post-program workshops help mentees and mentors stay connected and foster continued growth. Conexión, for example, hosts annual conferences and cohort meetings designed to connect alumni with industry leaders and help them understand how businesses work at an operational level.

## **Three enablers of successful mentorship programs**

Successful mentorship programs have three enablers: strong leadership, robust monitoring and evaluation systems, and coherent financial sustainability strategies, which ensure program success and continuity.

### **Strong leadership**

Effective governance requires strong leadership. It ensures that the mentorship program operates both efficiently and, in a way that is consistent with its goals and purpose. It ensures that the program remains adaptable and proactive in responding to challenges and opportunities. Strong leadership also attracts high-caliber mentors from reputable backgrounds. The CEO of Project1932 is instrumental in securing mentors from diverse fields, including ministers, CEOs of prominent companies, and partners at consulting firms. This leadership-driven approach to recruitment elevates the program's reputation—making the caliber of mentorship a hallmark of excellence—and sets a high standard for mentees.

A committed board of trustees supports strong leadership by having accountability for the implementation of the mentoring program. The board also provides the strategic direction needed to guide the program toward sustained success. Board committees, equipped with specialized expertise, support effective decision-making and foster a culture of innovation, collaboration, and shared responsibility.

### **Robust monitoring and evaluation systems**

Mentoring programs need to measure outcomes, assess effectiveness, and ensure continuous improvement. Feedback mechanisms such as participant surveys, performance reviews, and independent evaluations identify strengths and areas for enhancement. By exploiting this data, mentorship programs can refine strategies, enhance program delivery, and consistently align with participant needs and goals, ensuring long-term impact and relevance.

### **Coherent financial sustainability strategies**

Mentorship programs need coherent financial sustainability strategies to underwrite their success and longevity. These strategies diversify income streams among various sources, such as grants, corporate sponsorships, membership fees, events, individual donations, and crowdfunding. Successful mentorship programs choose income streams that are aligned with program maturity and objectives, as well as with their internal capabilities.

## INSIGHTS THAT ENHANCE MENTORING OUTCOMES

The quality of the relationship and interaction between mentors and mentees is as crucial to the success of mentorship programs as their design. Project1932 and other mentorship programs provide five insights that mentoring programs and mentors can use to enhance the experience of mentees.

### **Great mentors push mentees to sweat, struggle, and grow**

Productive mentoring moves mentees outside their comfort zones to unlock their untapped potential—potential that mentees may not know they possess. Half of the surveyed mentees reported that being pushed out of their comfort zone by their mentors supported their professional growth. Several of the respondents highlighted how their mentors helped them become more resilient by encouraging them to seek out new ventures and leadership opportunities that were seemingly beyond their current capabilities. Mentors also noted the importance of creating environments of “controlled discomfort,” and 70 percent of them encouraged mentees to take risks, adopt a champion’s mindset, and explore uncharted territories.

The 2030 Leaders program in Saudi Arabia builds this quality into a challenge-driven curriculum structure.<sup>9</sup> It includes immersive modules and a capstone project that aims to solve real, complex challenges related to Saudi Vision 2030 implementation, forcing mentees to stretch beyond what’s comfortable.

### **Real mentors use active listening to provide tailored guidance**

Active listening, whereby the listener makes a conscious effort to hear and understand his or her counterpart, is a skill that establishes trust between mentors and mentees and fosters open communication. The experience of being truly listened to encourages mentees to share their aspirations, challenges, and unique goals. In turn, it gives mentors the information they need to tailor guidance and align it with mentees’ specific needs, ensuring a personalized and impactful coaching experience.

The mentees surveyed consistently emphasized the value of active listening, with 70 percent attributing their growth to meaningful mentor feedback based on a genuine understanding of their needs and aspirations, and 50 percent highlighting the critical role of listening skills in achieving clarity and actionable advice. Mentors also shared that active listening helped them provide customized guidance to their mentees, resulting in outcomes that were both practical and transformative.

## **Transformational mentorship starts with human connection, not task lists**

Building a strong mentor–mentee relationship is the foundation of impactful mentoring. This relationship is established via mutual trust and open communication, which further enables mentees to fully engage. For mentors, creating this bond often means adapting to mentees' communication styles, ensuring that communication feels natural and collaborative.

Mentees' survey responses emphasized the importance of connection, with 75 percent of mentees highlighting the importance of openness and trust that was established early on by their mentors. Furthermore, more than 70 percent of all survey respondents stated that mentors who invested in understanding both their personal and professional goals made the journey more meaningful, pleasant, and influential in terms of growth.

## **If mentees are not making mistakes, their mentors are playing it too safe**

Successful mentors encourage mentees to take calculated risks. For instance, the Mohammed Bin Salman Foundation (MiSK Foundation) fellowship uses a competition that asks its mentees to develop innovative solutions for major issues in Saudi Arabia, thus encouraging them to aim high and develop resilience through risk taking.

Many mentees credit their growth to candid, sometimes tough, advice from mentors. For instance, one mentee shared how a mentor's honesty "opened doors to opportunities I never would have considered," highlighting the transformative power of risk taking. The survey showed that 60 percent of mentees developed leadership skills by becoming aware of risks related to real-world challenges and how to manage them properly. Mentors noted that fostering this mindset of risk awareness and proactive management often led to their mentees achieving extraordinary outcomes.

## **Great careers are built on smart disagreement, not blind agreement**

Mentees need to be empowered to ask "why?" and challenge the status quo. Programs like 2030 Leaders, in which 84 percent of participants reported career progress, include teaching modules that are focused on challenging conventions to foster growth.

The mentees surveyed consistently cited mentors who empowered them to run in and critically challenge traditional wisdom as enabling their development. More than 65 percent of the mentees surveyed reported that mentors helped build their confidence and decision-making skills, some adding that having mentors who challenged the status quo helped them develop their awareness of opportunities and areas where they could perform better. Similarly, mentors shared that teaching by challenging convention not only equipped mentees for success but also cultivated a mindset of viewing obstacles as opportunities.

---

## CONCLUSION

Mentorship programs can complement and supplement formal education to bridge the looming gap between leadership supply and demand in the GCC countries. By fostering tailored knowledge, leadership acumen, and a growth mindset, these programs can ensure that the next generation of top and middle managers is prepared to undertake transformational challenges, shape organizational and national visions and strategies, and inspire others in the quest for a sustainable and prosperous future in the GCC. Investing in mentorship programs today is investing in the architects of tomorrow's success.

---

## ENDNOTES

1. The GCC countries are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.
2. Strategy& projection based on reported labor force data by national statistical authorities and analysis of national visions and expected economic development patterns.
3. National statistical authorities of GCC countries and the International Labour Organization.
4. GCC Statistical Center; national statistical authorities.
5. Ibid.
6. The surveys were conducted among mentors and mentees participating in Project1932 and Strategy&'s Qadat mentorship programs to gather insights on participants' experiences, participants' preferred communication methods, important aspects of the programs, and career and skills impacts of the programs.
7. Global Shapers Community (<https://www.globalshapers.org/home>); Conexión (<https://conexion-all.org/about/>).
8. Asia Institute of Mentoring (<https://asiainstituteofmentoring.com/>).
9. Mohammed Bin Salman Foundation (<https://hub.misk.org.sa>).



## Strategy&

Strategy& is a global strategy consulting business uniquely positioned to help deliver your best future: one that is built on differentiation from the inside out and tailored exactly to you. As part of PwC, every day we're building the winning systems that are at the heart of growth. We combine our powerful foresight with this tangible know-how, technology, and scale to help you create a better, more transformative strategy from day one.

As the only at-scale strategy business that's part of a global professional services network, we embed our strategy capabilities with frontline teams across PwC to show you where you need to go, the choices you'll need to make to get there, and how to get it right.

The result is an authentic strategy process powerful enough to capture possibility, while pragmatic enough to ensure effective delivery. It's the strategy that gets an organization through the changes of today and drives results that redefine tomorrow. It's the strategy that turns vision into reality. It's strategy, made real.

### Read the latest Ideation Center insights



[ideationcenter.com](https://ideationcenter.com)

### Connect with Strategy& Middle East



<https://x.com/strategyandme>



[linkedin.com/company/strategyandme](https://linkedin.com/company/strategyandme)



[strategyand.pwc.com/me](https://strategyand.pwc.com/me)

### Connect with Strategy&



<https://x.com/strategyand>



[linkedin.com/company/strategyand](https://linkedin.com/company/strategyand)



[youtube.com/user/strategyand](https://youtube.com/user/strategyand)

# strategy&

*Part of the PwC network*

[www.strategyand.pwc.com/me](http://www.strategyand.pwc.com/me)

© 2025 PwC. All rights reserved. PwC refers to the PwC network and/or one or more of its member firms, each of which is a separate legal entity. Please see [www.pwc.com/structure](http://www.pwc.com/structure) for further details. Mentions of Strategy& refer to the global team of practical strategists that is integrated within the PwC network of firms. For more about Strategy&, see [www.strategyand.pwc.com](http://www.strategyand.pwc.com). No reproduction is permitted in whole or part without written permission of PwC. Disclaimer: This content is for general purposes only, and should not be used as a substitute for consultation with professional advisors.